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UNCLAS BASRAH 000006

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LOCAL AUTHORITIES CONFIRM NO CASES OF H5N1 STRAIN OF AVIAN FLU IN BASRAH

1) (U) Summary: Recent media reports and press releases from Governor Mohammed Mosabeh Mohammed Al Wa'ili's office state that the various numbers of people have contracted Avian flu are inaccurate. Discussions with local Iraqi medical authorities confirm that no cases of H5N1 have been found in Basrah. End Summary

2) (U) Stories about avian flu in Basrah began to surface on January 21. These were followed by a statement from Governor Mohammed Mosabeh Mohammed Al Wa'ili office claiming that five people in Basrah were infected with the virus. (Note: This statement was later retracted. The governor has since sent out three press releases stating that no H5N1 bird flu has been found in the province. End Note.)

3) (U) REO staff has been in contact with government and medical authorities regarding this issue. All have stated that there are no known cases of H5N1 in Basrah. Dr. Mushtak Abdul Mahdi, the head of Basra Veterinary Laboratories stated that they have found a small number of cases of H9N1 but no incidences of H5N1. Dr. Mushtak, who spoke from Baghdad, stated that another mobile lab is being sent to Basrah to help monitor the situation. Dr. Mushtak and Dr. Rasol Husain, the head of veterinary laboratories in north Basrah, are both in Baghdad attending Ministry of Health meetings on the subject chaired by Dawood Mohammad, Head of Veterinary Medicine.

4) (U) In another conversation with REO staff Dr. Samson Samuel of the World Health Organization confirmed that no cases of H5N1 has been found in Iraq. He went on to say that the United Nations has allocated 66,000 USD for an education campaign in Iraq.

5) (U) Mrs. Hajar Al Musawi and Dr. Wathib al Amod, members of the Basrah Provincial Council committee formed to monitor the bird flu situation in the province both stated that no human cases of the Avian flu have been registered in Basrah.

6) (U) Comment: A comprehensive check with numerous local authorities has confirmed that there have been no cases of the H5N1 strain of Avian flu in Basrah. Local concerns were fueled by inaccurate reports in the media and from the Governor's office. Hopefully public concerns will be soothed with the recent press releases from the Governor's office and more accurate media reporting. End Comment.

MF MARRANO